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# PCB-contaminated oil leak found at Ft. Dodge

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PAGE ONE

A tank holding 12,000 gallons of waste oil contaminated with highly toxic polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) was discovered leaking Sunday in Fort Dodge, state officials said Tuesday.




Pete Hamlin, a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) official said "a pint an hour" was leaking until Tuesday afternoon, when steps to empty the tank were nearing completion.

"I don't know how long it's been going on," he said. "The tank is bulging under pressure and there's some worry about a rupture."

Fort Dodge police said five National Guardsmen have been called out to guard the tanks there. Police said a three-foot sand and gravel dike was constructed around the leaking tank.

Hamlin, who heads the DEQ's Land Quality Management Division, said the Fort Dodge site is in the Des Moines River's flood plain, and people downriver will be warned about their drinking water.

Four tanks, owned by Al Schmidt, 51, of Cedar Falls, have been sealed since the DEQ discovered that four loads of PCB-contaminated solvent, totaling about 10,000 gallons, had been shipped to Schmitty's Road Oiling Co. there. Three of the tanks are in Fort Dodge.

The solvent, mistaken for waste oil, was to have been spread on gravel roads, a move Hamlin has said might "kill or cripple most of the population in Iowa" if it contaminated food or water supplies.

PCB is a thick, colorless and odorless liquid that is virtually indestructible and can cause cancer and birth defects if ingested. It has been held responsible for deaths throughout the world and its sole manufacturer, Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co. of St. Louis, Mo., plans to end production this year.

Hamlin said Tuesday that Schmidt was lowering the level in the leaky Fort Dodge tank below a broken valve by pumping some of the contaminated oil into another tank, and shipping the rest to his storage site in Cedar Falls.

The DEQ is sampling all of Schmidt's tanks, although they only suspect the four of contamination. Tanks in Marion are also being sampled, with test results from the Environmental Protection Agency office in Kansas City, Mo., expected this week.

Officials are awaiting the results to decide where to ship the oil. The Monsanto plant will accept its own product for incineration, but imported PCB must be shipped to a chemical landfill. Such sites in Illinois are being contacted now, Hamlin said.

Schmidt, who said he wouldn't have spread any oil until May, said Tuesday that the tank was leaking a "drop every 20 minutes" and that no one has proved the solvent, which contaminated about 20,000 gallons of his own oil, contains PCB.

But Minnesota officials, who found that 4,000 gallons of the solvent contaminated a storage site in Mankato, Minn., say there is no doubt the Iowa shipment came from the same tank they tested.

Officials in both states are worried about the potential long-term problems of undetected PCBs in waste oil, particularly when oil is mixed with PCB used as insulating fluid in electrical transformers.

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